

# The Scops Owl in Renfrewshire

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It was a somewhat excited Iain Gibson who phoned me on the evening of 20th May, to ask me what I would think of a Little Owl in Ayrshire, and I agreed that it would be an excellent record. As it turned out, he had already visited the Hessilhead Wildlife Rescue Centre, near Beith, and identified the first ever Scops Owl to be found in Renfrewshire! The bird had been handed into the Centre that day by the local constabulary, after a motorist had actually driven over the bird, which had been sitting in the middle of the main Kilmacolm road, in the early hours of the morning of 20th. Fortunately, the only injuries the bird appeared to have suffered were concussion, and a broken ulna. It was otherwise very healthy, and its weight was good suggesting it had been in the area for some time.

Andy and Gay Christie, who run the Rescue Centre, were happy that news of the birds presence was broadcast on Birdline Scotland, so that people could visit, if they wished, by appointment, and on the understanding that it would only be views of the bird in the cage. An estimated one hundred people visited the centre to view the owl there.

The Christie's were also happy to have a public release of the bird if Iain Gibson was prepared to find a suitable location, and if I could co-ordinate the news of the release. It was decided to release the owl at Birkmyre Park, Kilmacolm, on the evening of Friday 12th June and news of this was also broadcast via Birdline Scotland, from Thursday lunchtime onwards. And so it was, that up to three hundred people assembled at 21:30hrs on the evening, for the big event, many of who had travelled from England

The crowd formed a horseshoe shape, whilst Iain Gibson took the owl from the box and

held it in the palm of his hand. After a tension packed thirty seconds, the bird flew into a stand of willows, out of view, and its release was complete.

This was the 24th record of Scops Owl for Scotland, but the only twitchable previous individual was on Papa Westray, Orkney, from 5th-16th June 1986. It seems almost a superfluous argument as to whether the Renfrewshire bird is tickable. It is surely up to the three hundred birders present on the night to wrestle with their consciences over that. It was such a brilliant bird, and many people still can't get over how small the bird actually was. It was highly memorable to see the bird sat in Iain's hand, surveying the assembled crowd, before making its beeline to the group of willows. It is this that will linger longest in most people's memories.



PLATE 40. Gay Christie feeding the owl. (N. Benvie)

Approximately three hundred pounds in donations was collected from birders. Many thanks to the Christie's and Iain Gibson for making the whole event possible. The round of applause given by those assembled, after the owl had been released, sums up the whole nature of the evening!

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